



## **VOLUNTEERS WANTED!**

### **Wonderland**

Birmingham's Cinema Stories

Are you interested in cinema?  
Or Birmingham history?  
Or people's stories?  
Or all of the above?!

This autumn Flatpack are setting sail on an exciting new heritage project which will tell the film-going story of Birmingham and will culminate in a programme of exhibitions and events during the Commonwealth Games Cultural Programme.

Through mapping, research, oral histories, exhibitions and special events, we'll be finding out how cinema has shaped the streets, social lives and dreams of Brummies over the past 125 years. We are looking for a team of research volunteers to join us on the journey and help to piece together this story.

Some FAQs about volunteering for Wonderland and Flatpack.

#### **What will my research contribute towards?**

Your research will enable a range of displays and events in the summer next year including an exhibition and pop-up interventions in Birmingham city centre, and a brand new online resource including a map of Birmingham cinema's past and present; enabling people to submit their own memories, videos, and photos.

#### **Will there be opportunities to learn new skills?**

As part of the project, we will deliver at least three skills sessions for volunteers around oral history collection and recording, navigating the Birmingham Library archives, and 'masterclass' sessions with our research associates and project curator.

## What kind of subjects will be involved in the research?

**Wonderland** will encompass four broad themes / eras. We need your help to add to our knowledge across these areas, so that we can tell the story of how the city and its people were shaped by the cinema-going experience, and vice versa. Here they are:

**Fairground & Pre-Cinema** - *"the world in one place" – from the invention of celluloid to kaleidoscopes, magic lanterns and optical toys, fairground bioscopes and 'respectable' public hall exhibitors.*

**Odeons & 1920s / 1930s Boom** - *the first grand picturehouses, the Electric and its own newsreel unit, the birth of the Odeon chain at Perry Barr and the young architects creating pioneering cinema designs for the suburbs.*

**Peak, Decline and Diversification** – *There were over 100 cinemas across the city at its peak. We're looking to find out more about the role these buildings played in their neighbourhoods; the cultural impact on the way people dressed, walked and thought, and venues beginning to cater to growing South Asian audiences: cinemas as community hubs, with international relationships.*

**Multiplexes & 21st Century Cinema** – *the rise of home entertainment, multiplex boom, and the shift away from the high street. Increasingly versatile, the growth of pop-ups serving different audiences, outdoor and event cinema and the future of film-going post-Covid.*

## What kind of research volunteers will you need?

Plenty! A whole range of research tasks including - but not limited to - collecting and transcribing oral histories, searching archives, getting to know people and collecting their stories at events and exhibitions, note-taking for regular volunteer catch-ups, mapping Birmingham's cinema locations, updating the new Wonderland website with research findings and key info, responding to approaches regarding memorabilia or personal collections, and helping us to organise and label the findings from the research project. So there's likely something there for everyone.

## How long is the commitment as a researcher?

We would like our volunteers to help us collect, collate, and organise research during the period between **October 2021 and June 2022**.

Ideally volunteers would be available to contribute to the project for the whole of this period. However, this might not be possible to everyone, so please do get in touch at [wonderland@flatpackfestival.org.uk](mailto:wonderland@flatpackfestival.org.uk) if you have a specific period or idea in mind.

After the research project, Wonderland's programme of activities will go live between **April and September 2022**, so there will be opportunities to stay involved by helping out during exhibitions and events.

## Do I need to have existing skills and experience as a researcher?

Not necessarily. All we ask is that you're prepared to get stuck into the research and will follow our guidance and best practice around logging and recording anything that you find.

### **Will I be assigned a subject area to research?**

Potentially. If that will make the task clearer, we can definitely do that, and while we'd like to make sure that our research covers the areas outlined above, we'd also like the research to be led by interests within the volunteer team - especially in terms of mapping the histories in your local area. We would particularly welcome expressions of interest from people who want to find and share cinema-going stories from areas that are not currently well covered by the archives. This could include South Asian communities, LGBTQ+ audiences, and people with disabilities.

### **Do you cover volunteer expenses?**

Yes. We will cover up to £25 per day in reasonable out of pocket expenses. This could cover things like travel and lunch. But there might be equipment or other resources. Anything that helps you to get involved!

### **Will I be volunteering at home or somewhere else?**

Hopefully we'll be able to mix it up a bit. Research can sometimes be remote and solitary but there will be scope for meeting up in person.

Our regular volunteer progress catch-ups (below) will be online via Zoom and take place on a monthly basis - on a Monday evening.

Some sessions, such as visits to the Birmingham Library archives or collections will be in person; so there will be travel into Birmingham city centre and to our office at the Custard Factory in Digbeth. If you'd like to help us reach new people at events, or during our programme next year, then travel will be involved, which will vary according to the location but usually within a 4-5 mile radius Birmingham city centre.

All sessions will be planned and risk assessed in relation to current guidelines around Covid-19.

### **Can we volunteer as a group, or is it only for individuals?**

If you're from a ready-made society, group of friends, or existing research cohort and you'd like to get involved in Wonderland, fantastic: we'd love to hear from you. Simply complete one application on behalf of the group and tell us more.

### **Dates: Monthly Research Volunteer Meet-Ups (via Zoom)**

- Monday 18 October - Induction and Welcome Session
- Monday 8 November
- Monday 6 December
- Monday 10 January
- Monday 7 February
- Monday 7 March

### **Dates: To Be Confirmed**

- Sessions beyond March (dates confirmed on a rolling basis)
- In-person sessions at Birmingham Library Archives

If you'd like to be involved, get in touch by completing this [short expression of interest form here](#).

**Closing date for expression of interest - midday on Sunday 3 October.**

If you have any follow-up queries, get in touch at [wonderland@flatpackfestival.org.uk](mailto:wonderland@flatpackfestival.org.uk)